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Childlike: Queer Theory and Its Children

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M I C H A E L C O B B

Childlike: Queer Theory and Its Children

Making American Boys: Boyology and the Feral Tale, by Kenneth B. Kidd. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004. Pp. 288. \$56.95 cloth, \$18.95 paper.

No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive, by Lee Edelman. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004. Pp. 208. \$74.95 cloth, \$21.95 paper.

Curiouser: On the Queerness of Children, ed. Steven Bruhm and Natasha Hurley. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004. Pp. 408. \$68.95 cloth, \$22.95 paper.

CHILDREN ARE FORCED TO do some incredible things. They are, as we all know, required to represent our future, by which we mean that they have futures we can't yet account for, but futures for which we nonetheless hold out hope. But children are also tokens of the past—they remind us, perhaps, of when in our own histories we were young, of how we all made a tour through childhood, and of how that tour was laced with nostalgic goodness or traumatic horror, or some combination of both. Children, that is, remind us of time. But timing isn't everything, and so children are also forced to solicit our anxieties, our delights, our ethics, our love, or really any form of our attention, especially when politics and moral values are made an issue. In fact, when it comes down to it, and it always seems to come down to it, children can be most anything, other than themselves. And because they are pressured to do the work of placeholders for so much political, cultural, affective activity, they are everywhere, and they're very important.

So there's nothing extremely new about the sudden number of texts devoted to thinking about children in recent queer and queer-friendly work, especially since psychoanalytic theory, with its descriptions of infantile development and family dramas, has been crucial in the formation of "queer theory." It would be a mistake, indeed, to call the current moment "queer theory's turn to the child." Nevertheless, some exciting books have been devoting much ink to the linking of children and queerness. As Kathryn Bond Stockton writes in one of the more

impressive essays on such mingling, the queer and the child are a confusing coupling because dominant culture has a “tendency to treat all children as straight while we culturally consider them asexual.”¹ To bring these categories—these genres—of being into relation is not only difficult, but it’s also dangerous. In fact, a number of writers who are anthologized in the recent collection edited by Steven Bruhm and Natasha Hurley, *Curiouser: On the Queerness of Children*, have faced more than a little controversy: James Kincaid’s “now famous 1992 book *Child-Loving: The Erotic Child and Victorian Culture* met with outrage in England, where Tory members of Parliament tried to have the book banned . . . Eve Sedgwick found herself in the headlines for her work on Jane Austen and the masturbating girl . . . Ellis Hanson’s dean at Cornell received some one thousand letters of protest demanding that he be fired for teaching a seminar titled ‘The Sexual Child.’”² Making children sexy, making children queer, is playing with matches. And given the character of the current ultraconservative, values-worried political climate, some fire is sure to ignite.

But there’s more at stake than scandalizing those who would prefer children to be straight, yet not sexual. There’s more at stake than producing alternative accounts about how children are often riddled with queer sexuality. What I suggest throughout this review essay is that something about children—less as actual beings and more as what they are made to signify—liven up queer theory. Under my review are three recent books, each with children as their main sources of attention and concern, in which I’ll explore the variety of ways figures of children have produced a wealth of scholarly insights that are important for queer theory. There’s something fresh happening on this playground, perhaps because a child can stand in for almost anything; with a child, as so many of my child-bonded colleagues endlessly tell me, anything is possible: “they do and say the craziest” things. And it’s this elasticity, this playfulness, that helps some very smart people say some very smart things. The queer child thus tells me something that is no longer a secret: despite those who’ve been whispering in my ear that queer theory is dead, repetitive, or even “over,” queer theory, it seems, is nonetheless alive and kicking, which is lucky for us, because “now more than ever,” queers need critical, intellectually daring, and politically minded work to compete with the conservative family values (especially the value of straight, innocent children) that not only grounds the U.S. nation, but soon will apparently ground the rest of the world.

Let’s start with a strong cultural study. Kenneth B. Kidd’s *Making American Boys: Boyology and the Feral Tale* is, at the level of subject matter, the least obviously invested in queer criticism. It’s a more general, historical treatment of the cultural significance of “boyology”—a category that names the stories, discussions, and “discourses” about boyhood in nineteenth- and twentieth-century U.S. politics and culture. Indeed, there’s much we can learn from the variety of institutions (political, cultural, and literary) that surround the American boy: the

Boy Scouts, the YMCA, and books by Horatio Alger and Mark Twain are all treasures for scholarly study. Kidd tracks this lively American obsession with the development and significance of boys by focusing on “feral tales,” a generic name he coins in order to “suggest a resemblance between the literary fairy tale and a group of narratives that might not otherwise be intelligible as a genre. The feral tale is a literary but still folkloric narrative of animal-human contact or cross-cultural encounter, in which childhood figures prominently.”³ The professional study of children’s literature here meets political and “scientific” discussions of boys, but boys who have been in substantive contact with the wild world, provoking all sorts of tensions about who will count as human, what will count as human, and whether or not conventional understandings of “civilization” and morality will be either challenged or fortified by the feral boy and his story.

The complexity of the history is fascinating. Here’s an inadequate snapshot of the large and diverse scope of the book: Kidd demonstrates how early concerns with boys were, through efforts of the YMCA, inflected by rural, domestic, and maternal discussions of family life. But as boy workers became more institutionalized, the sentimental gave way to “more paranoid gender thematics of character building.”⁴ Boys had to be made, or else. This concept of paranoia carries throughout Kidd’s analysis. In successive chapters he has an ambitious agenda: he reads post-bellum Bad boy books alongside boyology manuals, which explain, in part, a moment in U.S. cultural history that resulted in, among many things, Mark Twain’s *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* achieving its canonical status. Kidd goes on to describe the manner in which feral narratives at home and abroad ceased to be about “an Enlightenment story about the redeeming power of culture.”⁵ Instead, these stories aided the colonizing, fantastical inquiries that would manage “wildness.” Kidd then brings greater attention to the history of Boys Town, founded in 1917 by Father Flanagan, who wanted to build boys’ characters by providing shelter for troubled boys. In the next chapter about the impact of the feral tale on the rise of psychoanalysis, Kidd produces some very intriguing ideas about why Freud relied on “the familiar figures of rat and wolf as psychoanalytic totems,”⁶ and outlines reasons why these “serious subject[s] of psychoanalysis” were soon transformed into the “comic stuff of mass media and culture” later in the twentieth century.⁷ He ends his book with an examination of recent incarnations of a “boy’s movement.” Each of these moves yields fascinating stories that convince one of the overarching significance of boys and boy work. The pleasure of Kidd’s archive, and of the tales and ideas he generates, is reason enough to pick up the book.

Although there are productive nods to various queer thinkers throughout *Making American Boys*, Kidd’s work fits into a queer context more by the way he produces highly elaborated reasons why concerns about children are so pervasive in the organization of American culture, which in turn helps suggest why queers’ relations to kids usher in all sorts of worries about civilization, tradition, humanity, and gender. One of the central questions children (both boys and girls)

ask us, through the anxieties they are often eliciting and representing, is whether or not the world as we currently know it will still exist when they grow up, especially if there are queers lurking about, panicking traditional, “natural” notions of reproduction. This cultural study was a surprisingly helpful companion to Lee Edelman’s *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. Kidd’s study fleshed out what precedes Edelman’s anti-Child polemic. Describing frequent invocations of the child, Edelman asserts: “[T]he image of the Child, not to be confused with the lived experiences of any historical children, serves to regulate political discourse—to prescribe what will *count* as political discourse.” But more than asking it to serve as one of many figures of politics, Edelman controversially puts even more pressure on the Child:

[W]e are no more able to conceive of a politics without a fantasy of the future than we are able to conceive of a future without the figure of the Child. That figural child alone embodies the citizen as ideal, entitled to claim full rights to its future share in the nation’s good, though always at the cost of limiting the rights “real” citizens are allowed. For the social order exists to preserve for this universalized subject, this fantasmatic Child, a notional freedom more valuable than the actuality of freedom itself, which might after all, put at risk the Child to whom such freedom falls due. Hence whatever refuses this mandate by which our political institutions compel the collective reproduction of the Child must appear as a threat not only to the organization of a given social order but also, and far more ominously, to social order as such, since it threatens the logic of futurism on which meaning always depends.⁸

Because Edelman’s book is a polemic, it comes as no surprise that there is much muscle in his message. And certainly there will be irritated scholars who will take Edelman to task for making such sweeping statements about politics, much less children—especially when the sentimentality of the Child is so intimately connected to long histories of gender and racial protest following the impact of abolitionist discourse and *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Indeed, there’s much more to say about how Edelman’s schematic does and does not line up with all sorts of instances of not only “historical children” but also the rhetorical children we can find almost everywhere. Kidd’s book, for example, would be one example of how “the Child” helps manage more than the future. But finding instances when Edelman disfigures the various stories of the child would miss the very suggestive arguments he wants us to entertain. Certainly, in our own times of highly entrenched family values, values voters, and the virulent disgracing of queer politics, Edelman’s book is a welcome interruption in the inevitability of our bleak future, and, of course, the inevitability of the Child. So I urge readers to take to heart, at least for a while, Edelman’s deep scrutiny into the futuristic gestures politics often, if not usually, makes.

So here is what I love about Edelman's polemic: it's theoretical, grandiose, and written in a research language, offering richly complicated ideas that still are grounded in a strong sense of political urgency. I applaud Duke University Press for still publishing "Theory," especially in the current publishing climate. It was truly exciting to read hard sentences again, wondering what psychoanalytic theory, for instance, might help us think. And in the place of what has become the obligatory, historicized archive ("always historicize"), we have provocative statements about politics that make us wonder about the rhetorics and logics grounding our political and cultural analyses. Rather than emphasize so-called facts, Edelman makes the figuration of facts as important as any historical story. He does as much, I think, because certain toxic versions of reality or history are too assumed to be the natural course of things. He does so because he wants figures, especially queer figures, to disfigure the awful trap of reproductive futurism that relies on the degradation of the queer in order to advance any kind of political claim. Let me explain.

Rightly or wrongly, so the story goes, queers are conceived as poised against the future because they are a threat to children—either because they are accused of recruitment tactics, sexual abuse, or not being able to have children. Of course, all of those threats are hyperbolic and without much merit. But the hysteria surrounding queers' relationships with children nevertheless marks queers as anti-children, and also, moreover, anti what children are forced to imply. "If . . . there is *no baby* and, in consequence, *no future*," writes Edelman while discussing critical reactions to P. D. James's *The Children of Men*, "then the blame must fall on the fatal lure of sterile, narcissistic enjoyments understood as inherently destructive of meaning and therefore responsible for undoing social organization, collective reality, and inevitably, life itself."⁹ Queers certainly entertain narcissistic enjoyments and are not necessarily on the child-rearing path, so according to the logic Edelman exposes, this sterility yields "no baby," which spells trouble for the future.

Significantly, rather than reproduce that negative figuration of the queer by offering examples and evidence that queers are not so dangerous for children (that sometimes queers find ways to reproduce through adoption or reproduction technologies, that the conservative charges are ludicrous in the extreme), Edelman revels in the possibilities of the anti-child position. If queers have "no baby," and hence, "no future," they offer a significant challenge: perhaps politics need not be so inclined toward, or smitten with, the future. Edelman thus allows for queerness's destructive figurations to be useful rather than merely derogatory.

Consequently, not wanting to reproduce enables queerness to *not* be subsumed into fixed identities that embrace politics' futurism, which always requires "the Child" in all its capacious meaning-making possibility. This theoretical move makes sense for Edelman because he believes "queerness could never constitute an authentic or substantive identity, but only a structural position determined by the imperative of identity."¹⁰ This structural position of no child, no future, then actively destroys some of the most fundamental mooring posts made possible by

the “reproductive futurism” of the Child. And Edelman finds good theoretical rationales for this undoing of “authentic or substantive” identities. Through arguments about irony, the death drive, the psychoanalytic concept of the *sinthome* (and a neologism, “*sinthomosexuality*”), and arguments over who or what will count as human, Edelman offers imaginative readings of texts such as Alfred Hitchcock’s *The Birds* in order to build a theoretical apparatus that exploits the manner in which queers “no longer disown but assume their figural identity as embodiments of the figuralization, and hence disfiguralization, of identity itself.”¹¹

I’m entirely sympathetic to Edelman’s suggestive moves, especially since they are not trying to hint at or proscribe an endless leftist utopia in which the political predicaments of today would be resolved—gestures that often seem to do no more than gesture, hoping for something good in the future, hoping for the Child. I’m also glad that he works to make identity-based knowledge more rhetorical. For politics now are extremely rhetorical, if not emotional, compassionate, and deeply conservative, relying on conceptions of the minority that are much too real, much too entrenched in ontologies rather than strategies. To remind us of the rhetorical “nature” of queer theory, and the rhetorical “nature” of queers, reminds us that engagement with the political, cultural, and symbolical fields requires figures that can disfigure, that can undo, identities and politics that seem natural, inevitable, and sacred—those identities, in many ways, made possible by the Child. It’s not only fun to be provoked by Edelman’s polemical sentences; the creativity of the thesis also helps to snap us out of certain perceptual cramps, certain horrible repetitions. And although he might be overstating the case about the Child’s essentially forward-timing qualities, and although he might upset people with his most irreverent assertions (“Fuck the social order and the Child in whose name we’re collectively terrorized; fuck Annie; fuck the waif from *Les Mis*”¹²), he does some very important work pointing out that our political names carry a destructive logic that need not only bind us inexorably to the worst kind of political brat—the future. Instead, we might “bring out what’s ‘impossible, inhuman’” embedded within future’s captivity: “a haunting, destructive excess bound up with pious sentimentality, an overdetermination that betrays the place of the kernel of irony that futurism tries to allegorize as narrative, as history.”¹³ We might bring out the ghosts, then, the impossible beings, in order to break open the seams of the overarching political narrative. We would not then get history (that otherwise irons over the irony of the queer), but something more excessive, something that need not be figured well in advance. Attacking the Child somehow sparks such creative possibilities.

Such haunting excesses bring me to the anthology that collects classic and new pieces on queer children, charting other uses and figurations of the Child that Edelman’s argument has no qualms about leaving behind. A number of the pieces include strange, uncanny, or disturbing sexual children, who are sometimes ghostly, sometimes freakish, or, in the case of Ellis Hanson’s playful and exacting reading of *The*

Exorcist, a provocative, gothic child whose sexuality makes it a figure “at once familiar and strange, naïve and knowing, transparent and inscrutable, docile and dangerous, innocent and guilty.”¹⁴ Bruhm and Hurley’s *Curiouser*, indeed, features just about any figuration that the Child might occasion. They introduce the volume helpfully, providing some crucial discussions about the ways “storytelling” about, around, and for children is complicated, fraught, and deserving of substantial critical attention, especially when queerness becomes an issue. Bruhm and Hurley assemble pieces that help “look to the dominant heteronarrative to see how normalizing language itself both produces and resists queer stories of childhood sexual desire—stories that often appear to be beyond the narrative pale.”¹⁵ And they’ve chosen an excellent range of pieces (some old, some new) that set up inquiry into the tangled-up qualities of sexual, queer children. The roster features the very well known: James Kincaid, Michael Moon, Lauren Berlant, Eve Sedgwick, Ellis Hanson, Michael Warner, and Judith Halberstam. It also features splendid additions to the conversation: Kevin Ohi, Richard Mohr, Paul Kelleher, Andre Furlani, Kathryn Kent, Eric Savoy, and Kathryn Bond Stockton. The essays by Moon, Berlant, and Sedgwick have often been discussed, so I merely want to note that, read together and alongside the new pieces, they give us a sense that interest in queer children has been around ever since queer theory’s own fraught childhood. Rather than produce extreme novelty, then, what this collection accomplishes, by creating a home where these essays have been familiarly united, is the drawing of our attention to queer theory’s more important, and I’d say more dynamic, objects of inquiry. I don’t have enough space here to take us through each of these provoking pieces, but a few major ideas that run throughout, and a few pieces in particular, deserve special comment.

Out of the contributors to this ensemble, James Kincaid has produced the most sustained scholarship on the sexuality of children, scholarship whose thesis that “erotic children are manufactured” compels us to figure out what is at stake in the sexual, “postromantic child”: “Childhood in our culture has come to be largely a coordinate set of *have nots*: the child is that which *does not have*. Its liberty, however much prized, is a negative attribute, as is its innocence and purity. Moreover, all these, throughout the nineteenth century, became more and more firmly attached to what was characterized as sexually desirable, innocence in particular becoming a fulcrum for the nineteenth and twentieth centuries’ ambiguous construction of sexuality and sexual behavior.”¹⁶ This vacillation between eroticism and innocence marks not only the child in Kincaid’s piece, but, in varying degrees, all the children throughout the anthology. His piece sets the tone for the essays quite well, prompting the manner in which Bruhm and Hurley divide the collection between two parts: “Sexing the Child,” drawing attention to why thinking about sexuality at all is important, and “The Queers We Might Have Been,” which tracks the way sexuality rather than innocence marks particular childhoods, particular instantiations of the queer child that need to be interrogated without the insistence on the negativity of its innocence.

One way to track queer children is to offer one's childhood memories, to play with the stories about one's past. So a cluster of essays is autobiographical: pieces by Kent, Halberstam, and Warner each feature moments when the "queers they were" were anything but innocent. At stake in the autobiographical gesture, I feel, is the idea that adult queers had childhoods that, contrary to the dominant story, were also queer, which from this vantage point in time, permits the theorists to have more than past innocence—they had important sexual lessons that shaped their present tense. For example, Kent takes queer theory back to camp—not Sontag camp, but Girl Scout camp, where its counter-publics of lesbian pedagogy produced unique possibilities for childhood queerness. This same liberating recruitment, however, also ushers in some dangerous, but still thought-provoking, questions: "With the paranoia around children and queers at an all-time high, to claim that sexual identities are 'learned' or 'taught' is to unleash the possibility that this knowledge could be just as easily used to justify its 'unlearning' or to restrict our access to children."¹⁷ Similarly dangerous are the erotic questions posed by Michael Warner's Pentecostal childhood, when "Jesus was [his] first boyfriend." In his short and warmly written piece, Warner evokes scandal and confession (how could Michael Warner have been a teenage Pentecostalist?), in part to demonstrate an inheritance that marks not only much work in queer theory, but also any identity-based form of recognition: "For both the notion of having a rupture with your self *and* the notion of a narrated personal coherence are Protestant conventions, heightened in American variants of Protestantism. No other culture goes as far as ours in making everything an issue of identity."¹⁸ And Judith Halberstam describes an early connection with punk and tomboyism: "From about the age of fourteen . . . I embraced punk rock culture as if it were a life raft in the high seas of adolescence. Punk allowed me to dress wildly, dress in scruffy hand-me-downs, mess up my hair, and scowl a bit. It provided a barrier between me and conventional girlhood and gave me a loud rebellious language for my outrage. . . . Punk allowed tomboys to extend tomboyism into adolescence."¹⁹ One thing that can be said about all of these suggestive if not lyrical memories of dangerous, childly insights: childhoods are narratives of extension—time bridges, if you will—that give us more than a past that was not functional or permitted. It's comforting to remember that the way we are now might have been because of back then. It's also fun to remember the lessons we might have learned back then.

So the narratives of queer childhoods, as the anthology goes to some length to emphasize, are important, not least because they give us different portraits of childhood. Through canonical literature, and with strong cues from Kincaid's work, Kevin Ohi's beautifully written essay, "Narrating the Child's Queerness in *What Maisie Knew*," is particularly effective in creating a portrait of the queer child. In a delightful, close reading of Henry James's text, he challenges innocence's insidious claim on and containment of children. Ohi isn't invested in producing a

counter-narrative that reveals the manner in which the child, rather than being straight *but* innocent, is merely full of queer desires that have been ruthlessly cancelled by “heteronormativity” (which in some cases is most likely true). He does, however, insist on the child’s queerness; “to argue that all children are queer, then, is not to argue that all children feel same-sex desire (which, for all I know, they do). Rather, it is to suggest that childhood marks a similar locus of impossibility, of murderous disidentifications.”²⁰ Ohi shares with Edelman a sense of the queer’s murderous tendencies, seeing real productivity in the impossibility of queer. But he allows for the opposition between queer and child to be less forceful than Edelman; instead, Ohi has his eye on a suggestive line of inquiry: “to what extent is it possible to make the queer child legible—that is, to attend to the child’s illegibility or its exorbitance—without duplicating a reification that enacts the ideological voiding/comprehension of the child in erotic innocence?”²¹ A number of this volume’s essays are attempting to do just that: to describe rather than circumscribe the child, leaving open the possibility for a more malleable rhetorical position in a cagey political scene. And the description is not merely in the service of detail, but in the service of opening new avenues not only to the child, but also to queer thought.

As I signaled above, Kathryn Bond Stockton wrote a particularly exciting essay, “Growing Sideways, or Versions of the Queer Child: The Ghost, the Homosexual, the Freudian, the Innocent, and the Interval of Animal.” I duplicate the logic of Bruhm and Hurley by also closing with Stockton’s work, mainly because her piece condenses so many of the approaches we see throughout the anthology as well as in the books by Kidd and Edelman. Stockton’s work is gutsy, stunning, a little outrageous, and exemplary of what I think queer theory and criticism can accomplish when it allows itself to play with kids. At the essay’s heart are concerns with time’s past and future, with the status of the human when it comes into contact with animals, with autobiography, with psychoanalysis, with modernist literature, and also with ghosts. In many ways, the topic of the queer child unleashes the possibility of so many different routes for analysis that Stockton has to tell the story all at once. And because she allows it to be speculative, the essay does some justice to what interests Stockton: “queers . . . trail children behind them, or alongside them, as if they are wedded, one to another, in unforeseen ways.” So she commits herself to the task of “hypothesizing versions of the queer child, offering a set of initial (not exhaustive) suppositions to be pondered.”²² These suppositions take the forms of various queer children, who are made legible (or illegible) through “species of strangeness”: the ghostly “gay” child; the grown “homosexual”; the child queered by Freud; the child queered by innocence. She indulges in these taxonomies because “[c]entral to [her] claims is the theorist’s need to engage highly literary indirections and linguistic seductions (such as we find in demanding fictions) that do what children are often shown doing: approach their destinations, delay; swerve, delay; ride on a metaphor they

tend to make material and, so, imagine relations of their own—my dog is my wife; my dolly is my child.”²³ Such an unorthodox form of theorizing exemplifies what many of the thinkers I’ve been discussing are doing, although Stockton does it in a more hyperbolic way: seeking to get beyond the prohibition and scandal of queer children, and to allow for the importance of the child to be turned into anything other than something thought to be natural and sacred and not open to queer play. That is, they are working out difficult histories and rhetorical tropes of the child, which have long been guarded by the more conservative, traditional family-loving members of North America. They accomplish as much through rhetorical leaps, metaphorical inventions, and analytical games. They do what children are thought to do in their most romantic, if not cheesy, idealizations: they are playful, they are imaginative, and they are suggestive.

Stockton, moreover, reminds many of us to not forget some basic lessons of our intellectual infancy—especially since many of us were trained in literary criticism. She gives us an exemplary metaphor and a crash refresher course on how metaphor works:

When we say, “Christians are sheep,” we almost seem perverse as we make a sacred point about Christians. This is why a metaphor is said to have a “vehicle” (a figure of speech—“sheep,” in this instance) that takes us to a tenor (a metaphor’s meaning). “Sheep,” as a “vehicle,” takes us for a ride. It conveys us to some new meaning as it moves us across the distance between two different concepts (“Christian” and “sheep”). And it takes time. There is an interval (sometimes it is long, sometimes it is short) between every vehicle and its tenor: the time it takes, of course, to arrive upon meaning. This makes metaphor a moving suspension. Meaning is moving and growing in a metaphor even while time almost seems to hang suspended.²⁴

Producing the intervals when we can see strangeness travel is important metaphorical work. But the meaning, the turning, and the growing need to be shown to have a suspension, to have circuitous routes that might not, try as they might, reach their destinations. There’s something so provocative in these snapshots of strangeness, and when applied to the queer child—for all the reasons we’ve been thinking about after reading Kidd, Edelman, and the rest of the *Curiouser* crew—we’re not overwhelmed and deadened to all that a child is supposed to be in the hands of the worst kind of adults.

Such an analytical move is very much in line with Lauren Berlant’s taxonomy in “Live Sex Acts,” when Berlant positions live (unexpected, novel, interesting, new, or counter-cultural) acts against dead sex acts: “I use the word *dead*, then, in the rhetorical sense designated by the phrase *dead metaphor*. A metaphor is dead when, by repetition the unlikeness risked in the analogy the metaphor makes becomes so conventionalized as to no longer seem figural, no longer open to his-

tory; the leg of a table is the most famous. In the fantasy world of national culture, citizens aspire to dead identities—constitutional personhood in the public-sphere abstraction and suprahistoricity, reproductive heterosexuality in the zone of privacy. Identities not live, or in play, but dead, frozen, fixed, or at rest.”²⁵ Stockton, like Berlant, is breaking apart conventions as she breaks down metaphors, producing somewhat “frozen,” but definitely not dead, moving meanings that allow for her most productive concept, and “it’s a live one”²⁶: “the interval of animal,” which resonates with Kidd’s focus on feral tales. This interval is a time and space designation that allows for the child to be engaged, if not replaced, by the metaphors of the not-human, and specifically, for Stockton, the abundance of dogs we find in novels such as *Nightwood*, *The Well of Loneliness*, and *Mrs. Dalloway*. The interval of animal allows the child to not grow up, but sideways, without a specific, teleological relationship to adulthood, and all the awful sense that status brings. Stockton offers, as a kind of conclusion:

Some of the densest, most commingled, most experimental, most inter-textual, and most telling portraits of the queer child appear in the first half or the first third of the twentieth century. And they all involve dogs. The family pet swerves from the Oedipal path it treads in order to offer an interval of animal and thus a figure of sideways growth. In the guise of metaphor (one the child can actively touch), the child, for a time, can hang suspended in an intensity that is a motion, an emotion, and a growth, even though, from certain conventional angles, it may look like a way of going nowhere.²⁷

Nowhere, or no future, or not where we’re supposed to traditionally go, or grow. But the figurative dissolutions Stockton and the numerous, queer others writing about queer children produce help tear apart the world in order to offer some playful other things: as Edelman similarly suggests, in his discussion of birds, “[r]ather than expanding the reach of the human . . . we might . . . insist on enlarging the *inhuman* instead—or enlarging what, in its excess, in its unintelligibility, exposes the human itself as always misrecognized catachresis, a positing blind to the willful violence that marks its imposition.”²⁸ Somehow the queer child has given us not only queer children and the scandals they occasion, but also the ability to be radically speculative, suggestive, and intelligent. Queers become children and, then, animals. Very naughty indeed.

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Notes

1. Kathryn Bond Stockton, “Growing Sideways, or Versions of the Queer Child: The Ghost, the Homosexual, the Freudian, the Innocent, and the Interval of Animal,” in

- Curiouser: On the Queerness of Children*, ed. Steven Bruhm and Natasha Hurley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 283.
2. Steven Bruhm and Natasha Hurley, "Curiouser: On the Queerness of Children," in *Curiouser*, xxxiii.
 3. Kenneth B. Kidd, *Making American Boys: Boyology and the Feral Tale* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 3.
 4. *Ibid.*, 19.
 5. *Ibid.*, 87.
 6. *Ibid.*, 136.
 7. *Ibid.*, 163.
 8. Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 11.
 9. *Ibid.*, 13.
 10. *Ibid.*, 24.
 11. *Ibid.*
 12. *Ibid.*, 29.
 13. *Ibid.*, 153.
 14. Ellis Hanson, "Desire and Interpretation in *The Exorcist*," in Bruhm and Hurley, *Curiouser*, 134–35.
 15. Bruhm and Hurley, *Curiouser*, x.
 16. James R. Kincaid, "Producing Erotic Children," in Bruhm and Hurley, *Curiouser*, 9–10.
 17. Kathryn R. Kent, "'No Trespassing': Girl Scout Camp and the Limits of the Counterpublic Sphere," in Bruhm and Hurley, *Curiouser*, 185.
 18. Michael Warner, "Tongues Untied: Memoirs of a Pentecostal Boyhood," in Bruhm and Hurley, *Curiouser*.
 19. Judith Halberstam, "Oh Bondage Up Yours! Female Masculinity and the Tomboy," in Bruhm and Hurley, *Curiouser*, 192.
 20. Kevin Ohi, "Narrating the Child's Queerness in *What Maisie Knew*," in Bruhm and Hurley, *Curiouser*, 82.
 21. *Ibid.*, 105.
 22. Stockton, "Growing Sideways," 278–79.
 23. *Ibid.*, 279.
 24. *Ibid.*, 280.
 25. Lauren Berlant, "Live Sex Acts (Parental Advisory: Explicit Material)," in Bruhm and Hurley, *Curiouser*, 61.
 26. *Ibid.*, 77.
 27. Stockton, "Growing Sideways," 311.
 28. Edelman, *No Future*, 152.